DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 314 758 CS 212 197

AUTHOR Flanigan, Michael
TITLE Establishing Criteria for Judgment: Writers Construct Methodologies for Truth.
PUB DATE 26 Oct 89
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the South Central Modern Language Association (New Orleans, LA, October 25-26, 1989).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Concept Formation; *Critical Thinking; Discussion Groups; Expository Writing; Higher Education; *Persuasive Discourse; Problem Solving; Teaching Methods; Writing Instruction
IDENTIFIERS Criterion Teaching; *Writing Contexts; *Writing Strategies

ABSTRACT

In teaching students to write extended definitions it is essential for writing instructors to teach students the concept of criteria. Without such a concept students will never be able to write effective definitions on their own. The criteria they establish for a particular definition allow them to judge which items support their positions on an issue. An effective method for teachers to employ is to turn direct lecturing about a concept into creating problems that students must solve. An example of this is a lesson entitled Scenarios on Sexual Harassment, which involves students in groups discussing their positions to clarify their criteria. What they learn from such an exercise is not someone else's definition, but their own, using their own criteria for judgment. Additionally, the writing instructor should provide criteria that guide his/her judgment of student writing based on this exercise and reinforce what has been taught through revision guides that reflect the established criteria. (Appendixes containing the Scenarios on Sexual Harassment lesson, two revision guides, and a handout on critical thinking are attached.) (KEH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED314758

ESTABLISHING CRITERIA FOR JUDGMENT:

WRITERS CONSTRUCT METHODOLOGIES FOR TRUTH

BY MICHAEL FLANIGAN

New Orleans

October 26, 1989

CS212197

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Michael Flanigan

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Establishing Criteria for Judgment: Writers Construct Methodologies for Truth

M. Flanigan

Since the Greeks (and probably before) a central issue in writing and rhetoric has been the responsibility to use discourse for truthful ends rather than for show, cleverness, or simply to win. How people arrive at "truth" is frequently more interesting than the "truth" they find. Universities are full of methodologies for finding "truth," or adding to knowledge through the systematic exploration of phonemena following agreed upon, or at least, accepted procedures. Often students in our writing classes are unaware of how our store of knowledge is added to, or if they are, they may think only scientists have a "method."

Central to any "method" are concepts such as criteria, evidence, data, examples, explanations, etc. Students need such concepts if they are to examine critically their own texts and the texts of others. So I believe our first task as teaches is to teach such concepts. Let me take a term such as criteria, for example. Criteria are the measures or guidelines we use to say something is true or false or, at least, to show what we believe its components are. In teaching students to write extended definitions it is essential that we teach students the concept of criteria. Without such a concept they will never be able to write effective definitions on their own. The criteria they establish for a particular definition allows them to judge whether an item fit or not. Let me guide an example to clarify what I mean. When I teach extended definition, often as part of a paper in which students are exploring a topic with readers or

trying to persuade them, I follow the work on inquiry of George Hillocks at Chicago and others who advocate turning direct lecturing about a concept into creating problems that students must solve. Instead of telling students Aristotle's criteria for courage Hillocks creates scenarios that make them solve a problem. To solve the problem student must create a criterion or criteria. For example, in the packet that I passed out you will see that the first sheets, labeled Scenarios on Sexual Harassment, lists a series of situations in which students must determine whether sexual harassment is involved or not. By answering yes or no they take a stand, but then they must tell why which forces them to create criteria for the judgment they have made.

GO OVER SCENARIOS 1 & 2

Obviously the scenarios are not simple to answer, and that is part of the point. Such scenarios get students to discuss their positions in groups and to clarify <u>their</u> criteria. What they come to learn from such an exercise is not someone else's definition, but their own, using their own criteria for judgment. Often students not only learn a lot about criteria, but they also come to see their own beliefs quite clearly. Such self-knowledge is not always welcomed.

Note that the method of arriving at "truth" here depends upon the criteria created. A similar situation prevails whether we are trying to define when a person is dead as in the Karen Quinlin case, or whether burning the American flag is

unconstitutional or not. Whoever is making the judgment must have criteria, if we are to have some kind of common standard.

Now, as you all know, criteria take many shapes and occur in all situations - I believe - in which "truth" is asserted, demonstrated, expected and so forth. As writing teachers we must have some notion of what a good definition paper or a good persuasive paper or a good report paper will look like. We have criteria that guide our judgment and our teaching. In an extended definition (which might be part of a persuasive paper) we would expect students to put the term to be defined in a class, come up with defferentia, create criteria, and use examples to clarify gray areas and reinforce the criteria. And of course we would expect such a paper to meet other criteria (e.g. sentence sense, etc.) that contribute to clarity and precision in writing. Once we have devised ways to teach the criteria for extended definition we can then reinforce through revision guides that reflect what we have taught. Let me show you what I mean. Look at the 3RD page in your packet titled Revision Guide: Unit III.

GO OVER #3, 4, 5

Now turn the page and look at the next revision guide simply labeled Revision Guide. Note that this revision guide is different from the preceding one that focused solely on writing a thorough extended definition. The second guide embeds the work done on extended definition into a persuasive paper that uses all the criteria necessary for writing a persuasive paper. Guideline 1 focuses on thesis and reinforces the concept of thesis by

making people in the revision group or session not only identify it but write briefly about it in their own words. Guideline 2 focuses on all the criteria in the preceding guide. Guidelines 3 and 4 focus on concepts central to persuasion, and guidelines 5 and 6 focus on problems of clarity, mechanics, etc.

GO OVER THESE SO THEY SEE WHAT IS MEANT.

What these revision guides reflect are the criteria that I as a teacher try to teach. They are what I will look for in the papers my students write. They are my criteria for judgment and my students criteria for judging their own and other students' writing. What I want students to learn from my writing classes is that we all have criteria for judgment, but in order for these criteria to be useful we must be able to articulate them, and then use them to measure the "truth" or components of something, whether that something is a particular kind of paper, a particular event, a particular value system or whatever. All methods of judgment depend upon criterial. In the sciences the criteria have become clearer and clearer over the years. In the humanities we have not been as clear. I think we can be, and the way we can be is by asking the basic questions, "How do you know? What are your criteria for coming to that judgment?" For in the criteria is the method. The methods an historian, a scientist, a literary scholar use all are based on criteria for examining and judging what they are exploring. Often our students think knowledge in such fields just exists. They are unaware that it is made, and it is made by whatever criteria are used by people working in a field of a particular time. These criteria underlie

the method that allows for judgment. I think one of our main tasks as teachers, and especially as teachers of writing, is to make students aware of the criteria we use for judgment and to have them become aware of their own and others criteria for judgment. When we do this I believe we will indeed have taught our students to think critically.

SCENARIOS ON SEXUAL HARASSMENT

1. Rosco, a Senior linebacker, approached Lola, a petite freshman studying ballet, after their late-evening Sociology class. THe hallway was dark, and he moved forcefully toward her saying, "I want you. I've got to have you... and I won't take no for an answer." After a brief struggle, he wrests her to the floor, and she screams. Earl, the school janitor, comes to the rescue, but Rosco claims that he was just kidding. Lola, however, contends that he was sexually harassing her. Was he? What are your criteria?

2. Suzette, an ex-model from New York, has come to school wearing a chic wrap around black dress with a slit up the skirt that extends to her mid-thigh. Rob walks by her and asks, "If I said you had a beautiful body would you hold it against me?" Suzette claims that his behavior was a form of sexual harassment, but Rob contends that he was just being appreciative. Was this sexual harassment or not? What are your criteria?

3. Clint stood smiling in the hallway by his locker because he could hear some girls whispering about him. "Oh my God. He is sooo sexy. Those Wranglers really hug his ass. Oh my God, what I wouldn't give to spend one night on a deserted island with him." He grinned until Mrs. Peabody walked up and admonished the girls for sexually harassing a fellow student. Was Mrs. Peabody correct in her assessment of the situation?

4. A radical political science professor frequently makes outrageous statements to shock freshmen students. During one of his tirades he stated that men are inherently smarter than women. When female students tried to rebut, he let them speak briefly, then cut them off and stated, "see told you so" to the males in the class. This resulted in applause by several male students to the point that five females finally left the room. Is this sexual harassment? Why or why not? What are your criteria?

5. Bob and Joan have been friends for two years both in the work place and on a social level. The accounting firm for which they work is throwing a party for its employees, which they decide to attend together. After drinking six martinis Bob begins to feel amorous. He whispers to Joan that he finds her very sexy and discreetly pats her on the butt as he walks away to get another martini. Secretly having a crush on Bob, Joan returns his advance and ends up sleeping with Bob that night. In the office on Monday Joan notices that Bob ignores her attempts at conversation. She is crushed. Is this sexual harassment? Why or why not? What are your criteria?

6. Professor White repeatedly cuts short the responses of female students and redirects questions to male students in the class. The women become irritated by this recurring phenomena, yet male students are noticing it as well. During one class discussion Dr. White ignores a statement made by a female student and turns to a male to answer the same question. The male student suggests that he would like to hear the statement made by the female before commenting. This confrontation angers Dr. White who then redirects the same question to yet another male in the classroom. After class a group of students, both male and female, demand a conference with Dr. White. During the conference he dismisses their concerns with laughter and urges them "to tell it Ms. magazine." Is this sexual harassment? Why or why not? What are your criteria?

7. Angela is a teacher in a small rural high school. Being young, single, and attractive, Angela often find herself as the center of attention for the predominantly male faculty. In her presence, the men often tell lewd stories and jokes. Because she is now on the faculty she doesn't want to make waves. Therefore, she smiles and laughs when these jokes are told and even makes suggestive comments herself somehow hoping to "fit in." Deep down, however, she would like this joking to stop. Is this a case of sexual harassment? Why or why not? What are your criteria?

8. Dr. Carter is the pre-medical sciences advisor for the state university. Carter often makes comments about the female pre-med students in the presence of both his colleagues and students, suggesting frequently that men only need apply. In addition, male student's often take Carter to lunch, while female students offering the same are turned down flat. However, the state university has many female students accepted to medical school each year. Is Dr. Carter guilty of sexual harassment? Why or why not? What are your criteria?

9. Mr. Wilson likes to liven up the algebra class he teaches by telling jokes to his students. These jokes are off color and they describe women in very demeaning terms. The women in Mr. Wilson's class resent his use of these sexist jokes. Several of the women go to the college dean and accuse Mr. Wilson of sexual harassment. Are the women in Mr. Wilson's class being sexually harassed? Why or why not? What are your criteria?

10. As soon as the weather gets warm, Sandra begins to work on her tan. She puts on her briefest bikini and sunbathes in her front yard for hours on end. When Sandra sunbathes, men driving by her house often shout out obscenities at her. Is Sandra being sexually harassed? Why or why not? What are your criteria?

Evaluator: Sec. 900, 901, 902

Revision Guide: Unit III

1. Read the essay, numbering paragraphs as you go. Analyze each paragraph, tell what the author is doing. Be sure to mark any which are problematic for you as a reader. (Use the back of the sheet and be thorough.)

2. Look at the author's opening paragraph and find the analytic definition of the term chosen. Is it too broad/too narrow? Analyze it for defining problems.

3. What criteria does the author use? Do they seem sufficient? That is, could you take an example, judge it by these criteria, and be reasonably certain that you could decide if it fits the term chosen? If not, tell the author what is missing.

4. What positive/contrasting examples has the author presented? Mark any which do not seem to fit the criteria or which do not help you understand what the author means by the criteria.

5. What borderline situation(s) does the author consider in this definition? Do they adequately show how the term chosen is different from other terms like it? If you think that there is still some confusion, suggest other borderline situations which might help clear up the problem.

6. Look over the piece one last time and try to give the author as much advice as you can as a reader as to how the piece might be improved. Please note complex things, like the possible use of new criteria/examples as well as simple things like cleaning up the grammar.

Revision Guide

M. Flanigan
University of Oklahoma

1. Underline the thesis of the paper or in a sentence or two tell what the writer is arguing for or against.

2. What key term in the essay does the writer define? List the criteria, examples, counter examples and "gray area" examples the writer uses to clarify her meaning. Explain briefly how her choices either clarify or do not clarify the key term's meaning. Point to specific criteria and examples in your assessment.

3. What claims does the writer make in the essay? List them and then underneath each list the evidence used to support the claim. Briefly discuss the adequacy of the evidence. Be specific.

4. Briefly explain the line of reasoning or "warrants" the writer uses to connect the evidence to the claim. You may wish to circle claims, bracket evidence and double underline "warrants."

5. Put an X through any part of the paper that is unclear or that seems off the point. Be ready to discuss these with the writer.

6. Put a check mark ( ) above any word that you believe is misspelled or any other problem that distracts you as a reader. Discuss these.

Ford Workshop M. Flanigan

Critical Thinking--Some Possibilities and Notions

1. Have students gather information on an issue in which they must present conflicting data that they must explore and discuss, but eventually they must choose a position which they would argue for (e.g., How did the American Constitution come to be written as it was? What forces were at work? OR How do researchers decide how to assess data, and how do they decide what criteria they will use to call something true?)

2. Have students present (orally or in writing) various points of view on an issue. (e.g. The benefits and problems in converting land in Central America to pasture land for raising cattle primarily for export to North America from the point of view of Central American small farmers, the fast food business in North America, the large Central American ranchers, Central American environmentalists or biological scientists).

3. Do instant debates in class on an issue and set up rules. This usually works best with a specific text in front of the students.

   A. Claims and asserts must be supported by textual evidence.
   B. Take brief notes on one another's remarks.
   C. One person speaks at a time--show courtesy and some restraint.
   D. Challenge unsupported statements in as friendly a way as possible.
   E. The teacher may direct traffic in the discussion but will not take part in it.

4. Definition often serves as a useful way of isolating criteria. Have students define such general notions as democracy, science, artistic, courageous act, significant outcome, and so forth. For their definitions students must construct a clear picture of the criteria used to make their judgments and must give examples that support, don't quite fit and do not support (but at first seem to) their definitions.

5. After students have set up what they think is the "thesis" of an essay, book or whatever, have them outline or discuss <u>how</u> they came to this conclusion. What did they use in the text and in their own thinking to arrive at their statement of the theses?

6. Have students write about or discuss something that they believe is true, and in their discussion they need to construct the criteria they used to arrive at this truth. How do we know the things we "know"?